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The emphasis upon vision rather than the saving of vision has brought about a change in determination of class placement. In public school, children with visual limitations are aided by four kinds of programs: 1) resource classes for children with visual limitations, 2) braille resource classes for children whose loss of vision warrants braille instruction, 3) itinerant teaching service when placement in resource classes is not feasible, 4) special classes for functionally blind retarded and emotionally handicapped children who cannot be contained on the braille resource class program.

Communication skills involve reading and writing braille and take into account the use of the fingers and the arm. Another skill is learning to read large type material. A third skill is learning how to write a signature, done with heavy guide lines on bold-line writing paper. The last skill is learning how to typewrite.

Among the supplementary services should be psychological study programs, guidance personnel, a physical activities program, and agencies to transcribe and duplicate selected braille books.

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THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED CHILD IN SCHOOL

By HELEN W. FIELDS

Director, Bureau for Visually Handicapped

Most of the day-to-day school experiences provided for sighted children are suitable for visually handicapped children who are capable of benefiting from the same curriculum as other children and youth. This is in recognition of the New York City Board of Education's long-time policy that blind children, if only they are not segregated but are allowed to live and learn with normal children, can do practically everything that sighted children can do. However, children who have severe visual impairments require special provisions. They need extra help to enable them to obtain equal opportunities in the life of the school and the community while they live at home with their families. Although they have special needs caused by varying degrees of vision loss they also have the same physical, intellectual, and emotional needs as all children. With guidance and special training they can develop into mature and independent individuals equipped with knowledge and skills.

Changing Concepts

Significant changes in the educational program for visually impaired children have been developed over the past ten years. They reflect recent innovations and discoveries which are resulting in a modernization of school practices. A change in medical thinking from the idea of saving vision to encouragement of use of vision even where serious impairments are present makes it feasible for visually limited children to participate more fully in the normal educational program. It has become evident that some children formerly placed in "Sight Conservation Classes" were better placed in regular classes for all of their schooling. It was found that other children placed in "Classes For The Blind" can be trained to use their residual vision and should be placed in another setting. The recent development and use of low vision optical aids has helped visually limited children who can use these visual aids to use printed materials more effectively.

Terminology used in special education such as "Sight Conservation Classes" has become outmoded and has been changed officially in January, 1965, to "Classes for Children with Limited Vision," a term that more accurately and scientifically describes the instructional program for visually limited children who are trained to use their vision. The title "Classes for the

ate description of the educational progra for functionally blind children.

In providing facilities for both admin istrative patterns the goal has always bee to keep blind and visually limited childre with their normal seeing companions a much as possible. The current practice i to place visually handicapped children o the registers of regular classes and to as sign them to resources rooms for specia classes from a resource class. Under thi plan the visually handicapped child is mor highly accepted as a member of the grou because he is enrolled in the regular class He is given fuller opportunity to develo socially desirable traits. He follows th same curriculum as his classmates usin special materials provided by the resourc teacher. He is expected to meet the sam standards as other children of comparabl ability. He goes to the resource room fo tutorial and remedial services. The braill resource room is equipped with braill books, braillewriters, slates, mathematica devices, braille maps, typewriters, talkin books and other audio aids. The resourc room for the visually limited is equippe with large type books, large print type writers, magnifiers, and audio aids. Thes rooms are staffed by resource teachers wh are specially trained to give assistance t regular teachers in meeting the learnin needs of visually handicapped children to provide for the general guidance of thes children, to make available needed instruc tional materials, and to provide remedia services where indicated. The teacher i a braille resource room teaches the blin child the knowledge and use of the braill code of reading and writing, helps th child to develop an acceptable degree o independent mobility, and assists the entir school staff and the community to under stand the nature and needs of the blin children under her care and guidance.

Types of Special Programs

The emphasis upon use of vision rathe than saving vision has brought about change in determination of class place ment. A child is no longer identified to b in need of special services solely on th degree of visual loss. The major considera tion is whether or not the child's visua defect is an impeding force in his tota school adjustment. A general guideline i preliminary referrals for placement in program for the visually limited is a maxi-

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a longer time to complete reading assignments and because the supply of braille and large type books is insufficient to meet demands for reading materials, recorded aids are provided to schools. A major source of production of talking book records, and books recorded on magnetic tape is The American Printing House For The Blind which is the largest publishing house for the blind in the world. Other books are recorded free by Recording For The Blind and by volunteer groups. All these auditory aids are an integral part of the educational program for visually handicapped children. The recordings provide supplementary regular classroom instruction covering the entire range of subject matter used in the general school program and libraries.

It takes longer to gain the skill of writing braille than it does ordinary writing. Braille writing is started in the first grade of elementary school with the child using a Braillewriter. This is a 6-key machine which resembles a typewriter but which embosses braille on special paper. This method of writing is introduced in combination with reading of contracted braille and the identification of braille letters. Another method of writing is the braille slate and stylus for writing by hand. This skill is usually introduced in the second or third grade. Slates consist of a metal frame and a pointed steel punch with a handle called a stylus. Braille dots are punched downward into special paper thus making it necessary to write from right to left in order that, when the paper is turned over in position for reading, the braille symbols can be read from left to right. There are several styles of slates from post card size to large desk size used by blind students in regular classes and resource rooms. With the aid of other types of braille slates, raised line drawings, and other devices especially adapted to mathematics and science, the blind student's handicap in missing visual aids is overcome to some degree.

In addition to writing braille the blind child may be taught pencil writing so that he may learn to write his signature. He uses braille paper embossed with heavy guide lines or bold-line writing paper. For blind students in need of a device which will help them write on a straight line, a special signature guide has been designed.

Typewriting is an important skill which is taught to the blind child so that he may communicate with those who cannot read braille. Development of typewriting skills is started in elementary school so that by the time the visually handicapped child reaches secondary school, he should be

The blind and visually limited student takes class tests, mid-terms, and Regents examinations in either large type editions or braille editions. The new city-wide testing program in action during this 1964-65 school year in all grades from two through ten is available in large print and braille adaptations. This enables visually handicapped children to take these tests (Metropolitan Achievement Tests and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) at the same time that they are being administered to all the schools.

Regents scholarship examinations in large-type and braille editions are to be given for the first time as announced by the New York State Department of Education. A brailled version of the National Merit Scholarship Test was available for the first time in the spring of 1964 and eligible visually handicapped students may take the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test and Achievement Tests using large type and braille copies. Thus, visually handicapped students are now given an opportunity to demonstrate capacity and achievement as well as an opportunity to compete with their sighted classmates.

Supplementary Services

To meet the challenge presented by the highly individualized instructional program for visually handicapped children in regular classes and resource classes an intensive appraisal of each child is an essential aid. A full psychological study of each child is necessary in the development of a sound program. This can only be provided to a limited extent by the Bureau of Child Guidance, which does provide some individual case studies as well as onging consultation. A large portion of essential clinical services is provided to New York City's public schools by specialized agencies for the blind. These agencies cooperate with special educators and guidance personnel to make provisions for psychological evaluations, family counseling, therapy, low vision aid clinics, medical examinations, vocational training programs, and social service work where indicated. In the classeh for multply handicapped children three major voluntary agencies for the blind contribute direct service through teacher aides, social casework and clinical services. The Bureau for Visually Handicapped also cooperates with these agencies in after school programs to provide instruction in directed physical activities, mobility skills, cane travel, recreational activities, camping, scouting, music lessons and self-help skills that are so necessary in the all-round development of visually handicapped children. Other supportive services provided by voluntary agencies include the transcription and duplication of selective braille books required by school children

Guidance services in the area of the visually handicapped are not only complex but very important to the development of a healthful educational environment for visually handicapped children. Special teachers for these children are responsible for their general guidance and in addition to the use of guidance services available in the general school programs, a guidance counselor is assigned to work with teachers, students and parents in programs for the visually handicapped. He assists in career planning and job placement activities. It is through the guidance counselor that teachers, students and parents are made aware of the clinical, social and recreational facilities available through community resources. It is also through guidance services that a visually handicapped student may be recommended for vocational rehabilitation evaluation and training.

Many governmental agencies provide essential supplementary services to visually handicapped children in the public schools of New York City. The Department of Health's Bureau for Handicapped Children is a partner with the Board of Education in the screening of children referred for special education services and in the reviewing of eye examination reports submitted by eye clinics and private ophthalmologists. The New York State Department of Education's Division For Handicapped Children cooperates in helping to effect an improved educational program for these children by co-sponsoring teacher training workshops, demonstration projects, surveys, research, and management of federal funds available to purchase educational materials for legally blind children in the public schools of New York City. The New York State Commission For The Blind provides guidance service for parents of blind children and cooperates with the New York City Board of Education in school placement of blind children. Talking book machines are provided on loan to children classified as legally blind.

The Commission For The Blind's Vocational Rehabilitation Service provides a guidance program for legally blind high school students aimed at helping students so that despite their visual handicap they can succeed in college or earn a livelihood consistent with their aptitudes and abilities. Evaluation studies and training programs are provided for blind students recommended by the Bureau's guidance counselor. Last summer an orientation program at Syracuse University for the September college freshmen proved to be highly successful for several New York City blind students graduating from the public school program. Optimum use of state rehabilitation agencies, specialized private agencies, and other available resources often helps the visually handicapped students to take his rightful place in society.

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mum corrected visual acuity of 20/70 in the better eye. Individual children with this acuity measurement or less vision are able to function perfectly well in reading all regular class materials including blackboard work. Other individual children with the same degree of visual loss do not function well when using their near vision and require special help and materials. In regard to braille class placement for the blind child, formerly the criterion was legal blindness which in general means a corrected visual acuity of 20/200 or less vision in the better eye. Some children classified as legally blind may be totally blind, some may be able to detect only hand movements or light, but most who fit into this category have useful vision ranging from 20/200 to about 3/200. There are 476 children in the public schools of New York City who are classified as legally blind. Over 300 children in this group are functioning as sighted persons in programs for the visually limited using either large type or a combination of large type and regular print reading materials. Some benefit from the use of low vision optical aids. These children with other partially seeing children make up by far the larger group of visually handicapped. Although they appear to function as fully sighted children, they need special care just as much as the more easily recognized group of blind children who require a braille program. Thus, the former criterion of legal blindness is no longer the only criterion for placing a child in a braille program.

There are vore 1600 visually handicapped children from kindergarten through senior high school who receive special services in the public schools of New York City. The Bureau for Education of Visually Handicapped provides administrative and supervisory supportive services to all schools. Four kinds of programs have been developed for these children. They are (1) resource classes for children with visual limitations (2) braille resource classes for children whose loss of vision warrants braille instruction (3) itinerant teaching service for visually handicapped children for whom placement in resource classes is not feasible for a variety of reasons, or they are placed in other settings, such as classes for the physically handicapped, the mentally retarded, the socially maladjusted, the emotionally handicapped, the brain injured, the deaf, the intellectually gifted, specialized high schools, vocational high school. Itinerant teachers travel from school to school providing supplementary instruction and special materials for these children, and they serve as consultants for the entire staff of schools they visit often ren referred for placement in the visually limited program. (4) special classes for functionally blind retarded and emotionally handicapped children who cannot be contained in the braille resource class program. This program is in cooperation with specialized agencies for the blind who provide essential clinical services and therapy in order that the progress of each blind child admitted to these classes may be evaluated on a continuing basis.

Communication Skills

The special problems presented by the child who has no vision or the child who has severe visual limitations are many and varied. Although their mode of communication is changed by loss of visual observation the blind acquire knowledge and communication skills through a combination of auditory, tactual, olfactory and gustatory experiences. These channels of communication must be developed to fullest possible use to give the blind child a means of communicating thought to himself and to others around him. Much research on sensory and perceptual processes relevant to problems in educating visually handicapped children has been done over a period of years. These studies are described in the 1963 publication "Behavioral Research On Exceptional Children," edited by Kirk and Weiner. Current research programs include topics on braille reading, large type size in relation to reading achievement, symbology for non-verbal tactual communication, mathematics instruction and listening in learning by the blind.

Braille reading instruction involves skills that must be taught by a specially trained teacher. The child whose major reading method is braille may start braille reading in the kindergarten when reading readiness is presented to sighted children. Progress and growth in a reading program varies as widely with blind children as with their sighted classmates. However, speed in reading for a blind child is governed by the fact that braille is a complex code system. There are 189 symbols incorporated into the English Braille System including abbreviated forms for whole words or parts of words. Thus, it may take a blind child longer to master Braille than a sighted child to master print. Touch is essential for braille reading and apparently slows up speed of reading. Methods of teaching beginning reading to blind children are adaptations of the current approaches used for sighted children. The teaching of braille reading is started with a combination of three methods — with the braille alphabet, with whole words, and with meaningful sentences. Touch reading involves use and coordination of arms, hands, and fingers. Children are encouraged to use both hands in reading. Often rather than left in his reading. He is encouraged to use whatever hand is easier with no pressure for change to right hand. Also, children are encouraged to use two specific fingers on each hand but are permitted to use other fingers if preferred. How a blind child uses his fingers is an important consideration in helping him develop desirable and relaxed reading habits for skill in place finding, scanning, and speed of reading. Braille basal reading series, textbooks, reference materials and periodicals are published for blind children on all school levels. In addition, a blind student is often in need of additional books not published, especially braille copies of identical books used by his sighted classmates in his regular classes. This need is fulfilled through the services of volunteer transcribers. These hand transcribed braille books are duplicated by a Thermo-Form process to make available a greater volume and variety of essential braille reading matter for blind students. Braille reading is applied to various other related areas, such as the expression of mathematical and chemical symbols, musical notation, foreign languages, the marking of tools, instruments, geographical aids, sewing and kitchen aids, mathematical aids, clocks, and thermometers.

Other modes of reading used by visually handicapped children are selected in relation to their ability to read any of the various sizes of printed instructional materials. A blind child with useful vision may read some large type materials as well as braille. Another child may read large type materials as his major method of reading. Many children read both large type and regular print materials. Finally, there are an increasing number of children who are encouraged to read only regular print. Sometimes these readers need to use natural magnification by bringing reading materials close to their eyes or they may use low vision optical aids. Regular print readers experience no problem in obtaining printed reading materials. However, the number of commercially produced large type basic texts is extremely limited and few or no books are available on the secondary school level. The number of large type books reproduced by volunteers is even more limited because of the length of time and the laborious work involved in copying a textbook in large type. The need for basic large print books is now being met through xerography, a microfilm method of reproduction. It is now possible to quickly provide otherwise unobtainable large type books to visually limited students who need them, especially on the secondary school level.

Braille and large type reading rates are slower for the visually handicapped child as compared to his normally sighted peer. Because the blind student usually takes